
3.1 Editorial Content

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Synopsis: Editorial Content guidelines for State of Georgia web sites.

3.1.1 Plain Language

Plain language is clear, succinct writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly and completely as possible. Plain language strives to be easy to read, understand, and use. It avoids verbose language and jargon.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms and public documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner. State websites should follow the lead by striving to write website content in plain language.

Help your readers quickly find what they need with these web writing tips:

- Less is more! Be concise. Cut the amount of words in half. Eliminate unnecessary words.
- Break documents into separate topics.
- Use even shorter paragraphs than on paper.
- Use short sentences.
- Use short lists and bullets to organize information.
- Use even more headings with less under each heading.
- Questions often make great headings.
- Present each topic or point separately, and use descriptive section headings.
- Make liberal use of white space so pages are easy to scan.
- Write (especially page titles) using the same words your readers would use when doing a web search for the info.
- Don't assume your readers know about the subject or have read related pages on your site. Clearly explain things so each page can stand on its own.
- Never use "click here" as a link - link language should describe what your reader will get if they click the link.
- Use "you" and other pronouns
- Use active voice.
- Use the simplest tense possible
- Use "must" to express requirements; avoid the ambiguous word "shall"

3.1.2 Editorial Guidelines

- The tone should be active, friendly and warm, while still carrying some authority as the official face of state government.
- Try to convey information in a visual form (creative graphs, charts)
- Use bold text to emphasize words and phrases

- Maintain an Editorial Calendar to keep content up to date. This should include a recurring time to revisit old content pages to update their details, and checking for broken links.
- Content should be written in an inverted pyramid form, with the most important information appearing at the beginning (preferably the first paragraph), and the least important information at the end, where users may be less apt to scroll down and read.
- Write clearly. Provide information that is concise and factual. Make sure that it is worthwhile and can be easily understood by users from a variety of backgrounds.
- Be consistent in the use of titles, subtitles, headings, etc. Effective use of these devices will help users navigate easily through your Web pages.
- Use the same style of text for headings and titles ? title case for document titles, references to other Web sites, and proper names ? and sentence case for subheads, figure titles, and lists.

Example of Title Case Example of sentence case

- Place links appropriately to maintain the thread of reading, workflow and context.
- Links should not disrupt reading or the task flow. Make sure that the user can maintain context of the information.
- Proofread all text. A spell checker is a good tool for doing this; manual checking is also highly recommended.
- Use AP Style. To keep writing styles consistent across the Georgia agencies, use [The Associated Press Stylebook](#) [1].
- Use a readability tool to test the reading level of your article. A sample tool is [The Readability Test Tool](#) [2]

Frequently Asked Questions pages

Users who need information from a Web site often need a common set of questions answered. These common, most frequently asked questions appear in what has become known as the FAQ. FAQs can centralize the most commonly accessed information in one area so users won't have to search different areas of the site for answers.

- Include FAQs for your Web site, as appropriate. Some appropriate uses include:
 - Providing an overview of your agency's Web site, function, business processes etc.
 - Initial education on a process or task the user needs to complete.
 - Summarizing the top things your agency does.
 - Summarizing the top things a user needs to know.
- Verify that the questions are actually questions that users and constituents have. This can be accomplished through mining user feedback and comments, holding focus groups, performing usability evaluations, etc.

3.1.3 Content Inventory/Audit

A content inventory is an ideal way to determine what content is on your site. It's a listing of every content item on your site, organized hierarchically. From this, you can extend the capability to determine what content should stay on your site - usually called a content audit. By gathering information about each page - purpose, age, visits - you can decide whether to keep, modify or purge your content.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to do this; no tools exist that automatically create this inventory. It's best to go through each section of your site, noting where each content item occurs and in what context it exists. Using your site map may give you a headstart on the structure, but more than likely, you'll need to flesh out individual pages on your own.

The following template is available to help you create a content inventory.

[Content Inventory Template](#) [3] (xls)

Editorial Calendar

An editorial calendar can help keep your website updated by scheduling times to review, create and retire content. You can use either a spreadsheet, Word document or a calendar program such as Outlook or Google Calendar for this. Document times that you need to publish new content, outline important dates in which news might be forthcoming, and, most importantly, schedule time to review all existing content to see if it needs updating, editing, or deleting.

3.1.4 Resources

- [The Readability Test Tool](#) [2]
- [Content Inventory Template](#) [3] (xls)

3.1.5 References

- [PlainLanguage.gov](#) [4]
- [Online Writing Style](#) [5]
- [The Associated Press Stylebook](#) [1]
- [Organizing Your Information](#) [6]

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